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And the Record Plays a Song Unending

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“What’s your most favorite song ever?” the boy asks you, disrupting the musical silence to spit the question around the unlit cigarette dangling from his lips. You and the boy lie face up on the old carpet that was once a shade of sea foam blue-green so bright you’d get color spots in your eyes if you looked at it too hard but now is just the color of a dirty ocean at dusk, patched with stains from parties long past.

The music that sashays its way out of the record player and wraps itself around you like it knows all your secrets is unlike anything you’ve ever heard; maybe it’s your most favorite song, but that would be too easy. You try to think about all the songs that ever moved you, all the music that ever gave you that twinge in your stomach that you knew meant something important, but it’s impossible to ignore the notes creeping across the floor, weaving themselves into the fabric of your clothes and nesting in your ears.

The singer’s voice is rusty and tired, filled with stories of a life not half-lived, of experiences that might not come through the lyrics but can’t be hidden away as they seep in through the cadence, through the timbre and the timing. You know as you listen to him spill out dusty syllables that ache with pain that if you ever met him you’d like him, and that you would never run out of things to talk about. Maybe it is your most favorite song, but again, it’s too simple an answer for such a complicated question.

And elsewhere, at the edge of your mind, you know there’s a war going on, one that’s changed everything and yet nothing, a place where the only music heard is the thump of the boots and the throaty chants of a man who knows he might not make it back, and the metallic click of his gun shreds a fatal melody across battlefields.

And elsewhere, there is a vague awareness that there is the tiniest life growing inside you, and this awareness at once excites and terrifies you. Something that will grow into something else with its own most favorite song that will be different from anything you’ve ever heard before. It’s a secret to everyone and almost to you as well, but not to the singer, whose voice is rising from the record player like it’s aiming for the sky.

And elsewhere, there’s a church where you sat on the hard wooden pews and were warned about sin and suffering, but also miracles and wonder, but not even during all the hymns, and all the sermons, and all the prayers did you ever feel as close to God as you do right in this moment, the scratchy carpet itching at your arms and legs as you stare up at the cracked and flaking ceiling, making shapes from jagged lines. And the record plays a song unending about grief, love, violence, promise and the suddenly infinite answers to the question that still hangs above the both of you, supported by the music that floats and flows like liquid air.

“What’s your most favorite song ever?”